WITH ALL YOUR MIND

June 11, 1989

8:30 and 11:00 a.m. Worship Services

John M. Buchanan

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Scripture
Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Luke 10:25-28

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all you soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind..."
--Luke 10:27 (RSV)

A friend sent me a fascinating document with a note indicating that it had been circulating widely downtown and he thought I'd find it interesting. The title was intimidating: "A Survey of World Trends Shaping the Future Business Environment." It was prepared by William Van Dusen Wishard who was, two years ago, a special assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Commerce of the United States. My friend was right. I did find it interesting... very much so. In fact when I finished reading it I wondered if Mr. Wishard's supervisor had read the paper, and concluded that he had not.

The paper describes the far-reaching and fascinating changes occurring in the world:

Population - we passed five billion two years ago and will add another billion in the next eight years... since we have been sitting here in worship this morning 2,200 babies have been born; Nigeria's population will be 500 million by the middle of the next century; and in just eleven more years the population of Mexico City will reach thirty million.

Technology - all technology is now obsolete in five years... Micro-electronics is changing the world as fundamentally as the printing press did. Robots can sight-read J. S. Bach, shear sheep and check the paint finish on a new car twenty times faster than a human being. Time and distance are virtually eliminated as factors in telecommunications. You can, in fact, talk to anyone, anywhere, anytime.

The paper was inclusive: Economics, - Environment, Life-Styles. Some of it was encouraging. Some of it was frightening. All of it was intriguing... the clear challenge to authoritarianism, the modernization of China, the increase of terrorism, and new worlds emerging in bio-technology, genetics, fiber optics, lasers and weapons, always the weapons.

And then, on the next to the last page, this remarkable assertion:

"The central struggle for the future is for the individual - for every person on earth to know who we are and why we are here - integrated with every part of ourselves and at home with people from every part of the world."

We have paid a very dear price for the material benefits of Western civilization, observed Mr. Wishard. "In the past 100 years we have alienated ourselves from the deepest roots of our own inner being. We have created people who can absorb massive amounts of data, who can manage complex mechanical and bureaucratic systems, but who are unable to provide a depth of meaning that links the individual to some larger significance beyond material gain, technical achievement on personal advancement."

We seem to have arrived at a point in time when the most critical issues facing us and our future are issues about which science, technology and economics alone have little more to add. They are issues of how we shall live on this planet and with one another. They are fundamental human issues which transcend the various categories of human enterprise, such as science, economics, politics. These survival issues require a new way of thinking - or perhaps a very old way of thinking - but in either event, a way of thinking that doesn't happen much currently.

It reminded me of a conversation Jesus had one time with a thoughtful, articulate, attorney... who came asking a question. "What shall I do to live?" Eternal life is what he actually said, but that did not mean life after death only. Within his definition of eternal life was a very finite dimension. It meant life now, full, complete, total human life in the world at this time. It is, therefore, the quintessential survival question, "What must I do to be alive?"

Jesus enjoys the question, I think. It is the best question anybody every asked. And good conversationalist, great teacher that he is - he puts it right back to the lawyer, in the lawyer's own terms. "How do you read the law on this matter?" The man recites the Shema, the Deuteronomic introduction to the law: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength..." and he adds "mind"... Love God with all your mind.

It's a very legitimate addition. For the ancient Hebrew the heart was the seat of the intellect. In Hebrew you "know" with your heart. What one "knows" as a Jew is the Law, and the God who is revealed in the law. That is the seat of all wisdom. Even though it is primarily a legal and ethical system and not speculative philosophy, Judaism from the beginning has put a premium on learning and the life of the mind as an expression of faith. Judaism has given to the world the gift of disciplined study, teaching, learning and passing the accumulated knowledge on to the next generation as a very real moral imperative... The children are to be taught; above all else...

One of the great human stories is the way immigrant Jews from Europe settled in America and immediately formed poetry reading clubs, book review groups and chamber music societies and how, incredibly, they did the

same thing in the Nazi concentration camps...discussed essays, debated ideas...

Loving God involves the intellect. It is there from the beginning. It is one of our oldest, most precious traditions. It was eloquently affirmed by that articulate attorney who came to Jesus and it was celebrated by our Lord in that intriguing conversation.

Part of what Christianity is about is the human mind, the intellect, the incredible human capacity to reason, to figure, to question, doubt, calculate, create. When the accumulated learning of Greece and Rome was in danger of being lost during the Middle Ages, the monasteries preserved it, protected the books, copied the manuscripts, kept the study of languages alive. In the medieval universities theology was called the "Queen of the Sciences": One of the first things the Reformers did was translate Scripture into a vernacular and the second thing they did was organize schools so people could read.

Our own Presbyterian tradition has honored education and the life of the mind. In the new world we created colleges wherever we went and schools alongside churches in every community.

Loving God with the full participation of your mind is one of our oldest traditions. But it is not true that Christianity is an academic course of study. Even as we are celebrating the life of the mind, we must recall that Jesus did not administer an academic test for would-be-disciples. Jesus called people to follow him and the response to his invitation, the acceptance of his Lordship and the obedient following, is what has always defined Christian discipleship, not the intellectual discussion of ideas about him.

We have been inclined to forget that. It has seemed sometimes that to be a Christian one simply had to understand a sequence of ideas about God and Jesus and human history. The unfortunate result has been that thoughtful people who struggled with the ideas, have not felt that there is a place in the community of faith for them.

Leslie Weatherhead, famous London preacher to the last generation, used to say that the words "must" and "believe" should never be used together. People find Christianity unreasonable, he said, when they are told that they must believe things they are intellectually incapable of believing. His favorite analogy was from <u>Alice in Wonderland</u>, when the Queen says she is a hundred and one years, five months and one day old. "'I can't believe that,' says Alice. 'Can't you?' said the Queen. 'Try again. Draw a long breath and shut your eyes.' Only by such a method can many a Christian accept the improbabilities of the religion."

In any event, when Christians have insisted that their religion is a sequence of dogmatic assertions which must be believed, the intellectual community has backed away. Surely it was in the middle of that apocryphal medieval theological dispute over the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin that someone thought up the idea of a "secular" university.

Love God with all your mind. If you use your mind at all, you will inevitably question assumptions. That's how the human mind works. Someone makes an assertion - someone else challenges it. Someone says the earth is flat because it appears to be flat. Someone else says it can't be flat. And so there has always been an important role for doubt, skepticism and challenge within the community of faith. Beware of religion that has no room for that.

One of Harry Emerson Fosdick's most famous statements was this: "All intelligent faith in God has behind it a background of humble agnosticism." That is to say, it is honest and responsible and faithful to say "I don't know. I do not comprehend all mystery. I don't have the answers to every question." There is a sense in which challenging the assertions and assumptions of religion in every generation is a sacred duty.

Now, what is lamentable and tragic is that what is questioned, challenged and often rejected is not the real thing. What I hear young people rejecting is not thoughtful Christianity but a collection of euphemisms and old misunderstandings. Nathan Pusey, former President of Harvard, said in a graduation speech one time that college students find religion irrelevant because of its juvenile concepts, primitive notions of God as an old-style father, petty judge or angry tyrant. "It has been my impression," he went on, "that atheists often have in mind some such gods as these and so it is not surprising, though it is ironical, that in so far as the unbelievers kill them off, they undoubtedly serve the cause of religion."

You shall love God with all your mind... How?

You begin, it seems to me, by simply inviting your brain to the encounter. Bring your intellect to the relationship. Don't park it outside on the steps to the sanctuary. Don't believe what you can't. Bring into church your critical ability, your faculty for analyzing and probing and questioning. It is an insult to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to assume that it cannot stand in the presence of the scientific method, or dialectical materialism, or the latest discoveries in palenthology or recent theories in micro-biology. Try it out. Truth is never to be feared. Truth, the Bible teaches, will set us free.

You proceed by asking questions and pursuing the answers. The sad truth, however, is that the process of religious education stops for most of us before we get to high school. And before that it is a low priority activity carried on for about forty-five minutes, three times a month and few months out of the year. The best we can expect, I estimate, is thirty-six hours of Christian education per year. The average American teenager watches more television than that every two weeks. To make matters worse, families frequently decide that church school isn't worth the trouble, or that the child has only one morning a week to sleep in, or that it's too much like school, or that in this area of life alone an eleven-year-old is mature enough to exercise self-determination. And so a process which has been going on more or less sporadically for about a decade ends at adolescence when the junior high is confirmed and drops out, and then concludes a few years later that religion is irrelevant. That's a little

like taking half a dozen piano lessons and announcing that Beethoven was a lousy musician.

One of my favorite images of the church is theological seminary... a congregation ought to be a place where people are helped to think theologically about the rest of life, where old ideas are examined and new ones tried with enthusiasm. The church ought to be a very lively place intellectually. Adult education courses ought to be relevant, timely and full; the church library ought to be the most heavily trafficked room in the building.

How to love God with your mind? By using it to its fullest, I believe: by being open intellectually to the whole world: by adopting and learning the graceful humility of one who is learning something new about the world and oneself every day: by rejoicing in this magnificent capacity God has given us to think and evaluate and conclude: and by resisting in ourselves that smug arrogance which too frequently finds a home in religion; that sense that we know all the truth about God that is worth knowing; that posture of absolute doctrinal certainty which can always find a justification for imposing its truth on others and which is immune from mystery and therefore isolated from wonder and the pure joy of discovering something new.

God calls us to be faithful in a particularly exciting and dangerous time. The issues of vital importance for the future of the human race on this planet are moral and theological issues. And part of the excitement of our time is that more and more people understand that and are expressing new curiosity about religion and new interest in pursuing the insights and propositions of religion.

That often happens outside the church. The Chicago Tribune reported that 80% of college and university students today think religion is important. Two weeks ago, when I was asked to make a presentation on the topic of Creativity and Spirituality to a group of people interested in the Arts, I was astonished with the theological sophistication of their questions - and their urgency. I continue to learn that when the barriers are down and people feel free to say what's on their minds the conversation will become, in some way or another, a conversation about religion... Where did we come from? Why are we here? What becomes of us? How shall we live?... And I also continue to discover that people do not so much want answers, particularly the glib answers they have come to associate with religion, so much as some sense that the church and church people are asking the questions too.

God created the human mind. Think of it. Your intellect was God's intent. God is honored when it is well and thoroughly used.

To love God with your mind is to keep it open. And that may mean the discomfort of doubt and the pain of growing. It may mean saying those three little words that we have such difficulty saying... "I don't know." It may mean assuming the occasional posture of reverent agnostic. Faith allows that. If I am certain of anything it is that God blesses the search for truth and smiles when people join it.

The late J. Harry Cotton was a scholar, professor of philosophy at Harvard, and for a brief time, President of McCormick Theological Seminary. He was also a pastor, a predecessor of mine and it was in that capacity that I was privileged to be in the chancel with him when he preached a sermon during his eightieth year - not long before he died. I shall never forget what he said, paraphrasing Shakespeare, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." [Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5]; said Cotton in the conclusion to that service:

"There is more to this Christian faith, oh much, much more, than you and I ever imagined."

I have found that to be true... To live in openness and anticipation, confessing that the Christian faith, the Gospel of God is always bigger than my capacity to comprehend... that is what the words mean which the lawyer recited to Jesus and which Jesus himself believed... and which I commend to you this morning...

"You shall love the Lord your God with...all your mind."

Amen.